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【研究ノート】

A Grammatical Analysis of yòu and zài in Mandarin Chinese

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This study aims at providing an account to the differences between two Chinese adverbs “yòu 又” and “zài 再”. Native speakers of Mandarin Chinese use the adverbs without problem but Chinese learners find it difficult to distinguish them. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can clarify the distinction between these two adverbs. In this paper, the author will review and examine the claims made in various articles about the similarities and differences of the two words, and identify the issues related to these two adverbs. The author will also state the significance of this study and point out issues that can be further studied.

1. Introduction

Chinese adverbs “yòu 又” and “zài 再” form an interesting pair with similar meanings and usage. In some sentences they are interchangeable while in others they are not (or may change the meaning if interchanged) :

- 1) 一些已经返校的学生听到老李的讲话和后情绪激动，部份学生又重返广场¹⁾。

Yìxiē yǐjīng fǎnxiào de xuésheng tīngdào lǎoLǐ de jiǎnghuà hé qíngxùjīdòng, bùfēn xuésheng yòu chóngfǎn guǎngchǎng.

Some students who have returned to school have heard Lao Li's speech and emotional excitement, and some of the students have returned to the square.

- 2) 一些已经返校的学生听到李鹏的讲和后情绪激动，部份学生再重返广场。

Yìxiē yǐjīng fǎnxiào de xuésheng tīngdào lǎoLǐ de jiǎnghuà hé qíngxùjīdòng, bùfēn xuésheng zài chóngfǎn guǎngchǎng.

Some students who have returned to school have heard Li Peng's speech and emotional excitement, and some students have returned to the square.

- 3) 作为中国人自然感到自豪，同时又隐隐地有些担忧。

Zuòwéi Zhōngguó rén zìrán gǎndào zì háo, tóng shí yòu yīnyīnde yǒuxiē dānyōu.

As a Chinese, I am naturally proud and at the same time faintly worried.

- 4) *作为中国人自然感到自豪，同时再隐隐地有些担忧。

Zuòwéi Zhōngguó rén zìrán gǎndào zì háo, tóng shí zài yīnyīnde yǒuxiē dānyōu.

* Being a Chinese person is naturally proud, and at the same time there are some hidden concerns.

What decides their compatibility is an interesting question and it may be closely related to the problem of how they differ from each other.

Native speakers of Mandarin Chinese use the adverbs without problem but Chinese learners find it difficult to distinguish them. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can clarify the distinction between “yòu 又” and “zài 再”, and thus help to differentiate other Chinese adverbs such as “yě 也” and “hái 还”. Hence it may reduce the number of problems encountered by Chinese learners in this aspect.

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Practically, the result of the study can be used in the computer processing of Chinese adverbs.

Traditionally, the explanation of some Chinese adverbs can perform an unusual wide range of functions is mysterious to linguists (e.g. Biq, 1988, 1994). For example, “yòu 又” can function as connectives to connect constituents belonging to different categories, but it may be used as contrastive or emphatic particle. Examples of these usage are shown as following:

5a) 一次又一次

yíci yòu yíci

again and again

5b) 一个又一个

yíge yòu yíge

one after another

5c) 一年又一年

yínián yòu yínián

year after year

5d) 这是一件平凡而又平凡的事。

Zhè shì yíjiàn píngfán ér yòu píngfán de shì.

This is an ordinary and ordinary thing.

5e) 你跟他说是白说,他又不知道事情的全部经过。

Nǐ gēn tā shuō yěshì bái shuō, tā yòubù liǎojiě shìqíng de quánbù jīngguò.

You tell him that he is also white, and he does not understand the whole process of the matter.

5f) 林先生望着楼梯发怔,心里感到有什么要紧的事,却又乱麻麻地总是想不起。

Línxiānshēng wàng zhuó lóutī fāzhēng, xīnlǐ gǎndào yǒu shěme yàojǐn dí shì, què yòu luàn mámádi zǒngshì xiǎngbùqǐ.

Mr. Lin looked at the stairs and felt that something was important in his heart, but he could not remember it.

In the above examples, the constituents being connected in 5a) and 5b) are measure words, while that of 5c) are noun phrases, and in 5d) “yòu 又” is used to emphasize “平凡”, in 5e) it is also used to

emphasize “不了解”, and lastly, in 5f) it is used to contrast two things. In addition to example 5), examples 1) and 2) demonstrated the clause or discourse connecting function of “yòu 又”. We can see that “yòu 又” is really a multi-functional word. Biq (1988) proposed that all functions of “yòu 又” are related to information accumulation and he defined that there are two kinds of accumulation: one is objective accumulation of relevance and the other is subjective accumulation of relevance. Simply speaking, that the constituents of a sentence or discourse are apparently conjoined by the word is called objectively accumulation. While any other non-conjoining (at least not apparent) usage of the word, such as the contrastive or emphatic use of “yòu 又” is classified as subjective accumulation.

Originally, this study intended to focus on the use of “yòu 又” and “zài 再” in the sense of “also”. However, the author has found that it will make the study quite confined. In fact, none of the two words is one hundred percent corresponding to the English word “also”. The author observed that the usage of the two adverbs often not only involve the sense of “also”, but also involve other sense like “again” and “then”. When we consider the case of “zài 再”, we can find that it always indicate a sequence and the clause containing “zài 再” always expresses an event that happened after the other clause. For example,

6) 一位作家出名后就当了文化经纪人,他一次性买断作家,再高价卖给出版社。

Yíwèi zuòjiā chūmíng hòu jiù dāngle wénhuà jīngjìrén, tā yícíxìng mǎiduàn zuòjiā, zài gāojià mài gěi chūbǎnshè.

An author became a cultural agent after he became famous. He bought the writer once and sold it to the publisher at a high price.

The above sentence clearly indicates a sequence. Even we consider a sentence that contains “zài 再” used in “also” sense like the one below, it is still a sequence that includes the sense of “again”.

- 7) 是因为王震罵了你，我再罵你，我成了他的帮凶了。

Shì yīnwèi Wángzhèn màle nǐ, wǒ zài nǐ wǒ chéng le tā de bāngxiōng le.

Because Wang Zhen has married you, I am jealous of you again, I became his accomplice.

Therefore, the author decided that he will expand the scope of my paper but within the boundary of, using the terminology of Biq (1988), the objectivity accumulation of relevance of adverb “yòu 又” and “zài 再”

2. Literature Reviews

2.1 Syntactic Properties

Since the two words are adverbs, their syntactic properties are identical to other Chinese adverbs. They appear between subject and predicate and their function is modifying other linguistic constituents in the same sentence such as predicate verb phrase or subject noun phrase.

In their adverbial usage, “yòu 又” and “zài 再” function as clause connectives if they are used in compound sentences. They can also functions as discourse connectives if they are embedded in a clause that with no preceding clause. Below are some examples (with the two words as clause connectives underlined).

In simple sentences:

- 8) 他又打破了一只盘子。

Tā yòu dǎpòle yìzhī pánzi.

He (also) broke a plate (again) .

- 9) 他再去北京。

Tā zài chū bei jīng.

He goes to Beijing again.

In compound sentences:

- 10) 日方擂主大竹英雄九段背水一战，挡住五连胜的常昊七段后，又中盘胜俞斌九段。

Rìfāng lèizhǔ Dàzhú Yīngxióng jiǔduàn bèi shuǐ yízhàn, dǎng zhù wúliánshèng de cháng hào qíduàn hòu, yòu Zhōngpán shèng yú bīn

jiǔduàn.

The Japanese side's main Dazhu hero's Jiu Duan's backwaters fought a battle, blocking the five-game winning streak of the Chang's seven-segment, and the middle plate won Yu Bin's nine-segment.

- 11) 他骂完小明之后，再把小俊叫来骂了一顿。

Tā màwán xiǎoMíng zhìhòu, zài bǎ xiǎoJùn jiào lái màle yí dùn.

After scolded Xiao Ming, he also scolded Xiao Jun.

There is little to say about the syntactic properties of these adverbs except one thing: how to represent them in phrase structure tree. Undoubtedly “yòu 又” and “zài 再” are adverbs and superficially they are situated between subject and predicate. However it is arguable whether they should be represented as ordinary adverbs in phrase marker, i.e., dominated by phrasal constituents. Functionally, they are clause or discourse connectives and they should be performing their functions at sentential level and hence it may be more accurate to place them as sisters of calusal constituents.

2.2 Semantic Properties

Biq (1988: 117) has concluded the grammatical function of “yòu 又” as follows:

“the grammatical function of *yòu* is to ‘accumulate relevant properties for the same entity’, or for short, the accumulation of relevance”

According to literatures “*Xiàndài Hànyǔ bābǎicí* 《现代汉语八百词》” and “*Xiàndài Hànyǔ xūcí lishi* 《现代汉语虚词例释》”, when used to represent “information accumulation”, the adverb “yòu 又” has three meanings:

- i) to represent same kind of behaviour or action has been repeated. For example:

- 12) 他买了一本书，又买了一枝笔。

Tā mǎile yíběnshū, yòu mǎile yìzhībǐ.

He bought a book, and also bought a pen.

ii) to represent one kind of behavior or action follows another kind of behaviour or action. For example:

- 13) 他看了一场电影，又去参观了新开的博物馆。
Tā kànle yìchǎng diànyǐng, yòu qù cānguānle xīnkāide bówùguǎn.
He saw a film, and also went to a newly opened museum.

iii) to indicate sharing, addition or accumulate. For example:

- 14) 除了原有的力量之外，上级又给他们派去两名技术员。
Chú le yuányǒude lìliang zhīwài, shàngjí yòu gěi tāmen pàiqù liǎngmíng jìshùyuán.
Except the original force, the upper class also sent them two technicians.

- 15) 香港先天有优越的地理环境，又有香港市民的努力耕耘，才有今天的成就。
Xiānggǎng xiāntiān yǒu yōuyüè de dìlì huán jìng, yòu yǒu Xiānggǎng shímín de lì gēng, cái yǒu jīntiān de chéngjiù.
Hong Kong has an innate excellent geographical environment, and its people also work hard, therefore it got today's achievement.

Now we discuss the semantic properties of “zài再”. At first look, the meaning of “zài再” is similar to “yòu又”. According to “*Xiàndài Hànyǔ xūcí lìshì* 《现代汉语虚词例释》”, it has the following meanings.

iv) can represent the repetition of the same kind of actions or behaviours:

- 16) 我先說功課的內容，再說功課的評分標準。
Wǒ xiānshuō gōngkè de nèiróng, zài shuō gōngkède píngfēn biāozhǔn.
I will first talk about the content of the homework, and then the grades of the homework.

It can also indicate that one affair or action happens after a different affair or action.

For example:

- 17) 他吃了一大碗飯，再到街上去吃了兩碗雲吞²⁾。

Tā chīle yídà wǎnfàn, zài dào jiēshang qùchī le liǎngwǎn húntun.

He ate a large bowl of rice and went to the street to eat two bowls of cloud.

- 18) 他回到課室，再坐下來複習功課。

Tā huídào kèshì, zài zuòxiàlái fùxí gōngkè.

He returns to the classroom and sits down to review his lessons.

3. Previous Treatments

According to Li & Thompson (1981) and many other articles, the distribution of Chinese adverbs “yòu又” and “zài再” is mainly influenced by temporal factor. Li & Thompson stated that

“Zài ‘again’ refers to events that have not yet happened, whereas yòu ‘again’ applies either to past or to present events.” (1981:329)

That means

- 19) 他大前天剛去過日本，昨天又去了。

Tā dàqiántiān gāng qùguò Riběn, zuótiān yòu qùle.

Three days ago he has gone to Japan, he went there again yesterday.

is acceptable while

- 20) ?/*他前天剛去過日本，明天又去一趟。

Tā qiántiān gāngqùguò Riběn, míngtiān yòu qù yítàng.

?/* He just went to Japan the day before yesterday and went to see you tomorrow.

is not, and

- 21) *他前天剛去過日本，昨天再去一趟。

Tā qiántiān gāngqùguò Riběn, zuótiān zài qù yítàng.

* He had just been to Japan the day before yesterday and went to see it again yesterday.

is not acceptable while

- 22) 他前天剛去過日本，明天再去一趟。

Tā qiántiān gāngqùguò Riběn, míngtiān zài qù yítàng.

He has just been to Japan the day before

yesterday and will go to see you tomorrow.
is completely correct. However we can often find examples that use “zài” to describe past events as in 23) :

- 23) 很多年以后, 才听说他离开学校去了农场, 再上了大学, 现在本地某中学任教。

Hěnduōnián yǐhòu, cáitīng tā líkāi xué jiào qù le nóngchǎng, zài shingle dàxué, xiànzài běn dì mǒu zhōngxué rènjiāo.

After many years, I heard that he left the school to go to the farm, went to college, and now teaches at a local high school.

Using “zài再” in past events is not unusual, let us see some examples:

- 24) 他昨天再去, 但店舖已经关门了。

Tā zuótiān zàiqù, dàn diànpù yǐjīng guānmén le.

He went again yesterday, but the store has closed.

We may use “yòu” to replace “zài再” in a past event:

- 25) 他昨天又去, 但店舖已经关门了。

Tā zuótiān yòu qù, dàn diànpù yǐjīng guānmén le.

He went again yesterday, but the store has closed.

However, it seems that the first sentence is even more acceptable than the second one. Although the two words are used in first clause, they are certainly adverbs because they appear between subject and predicate. In this way the constraint for “zài再” stated by Li & Thompson seems to be inappropriate.

The author once studied four Chinese adverbs “yòu又”, “ye也”, “hai還” and “zài再” closely and he has come out with some conclusions by means of “stage-level predicates”, “individual-level predicates”³⁾.

It has suggested that these adverbs are subject to different co-occurrence constraints. Special attention was paid to compound sentences that contain these words and claimed that

“yòu is subject to the same subject constraint for individual-level predicate, ... and zài is subject to the temporal constraint.”

This means that in a compound sentence that using adverb “yòu又”, the subject of the component clauses must be the same if their predicates are individual-level predicates. Therefore

- 26) 张三长得很高, 又长得很胖。

Zhāngsān zhǎngde hěngāo, yòu zhǎngde hěnpàng.

Zhang San is very tall and very fat.

is acceptable while

- 27) *张三长得很高, 李四又长得很胖。

Zhāngsān zhǎngde hěngāo, Lǐsì yòu zhǎng de hěnpàng.

* Zhang San is very tall, and Li Si is very fat.

is not.

For stage-level predicate, the author mentioned that the clause containing “yòu又” may be expressing a kind of accomplishment or activity while the preceding clause must express accomplishment.

For “zài再”, the author assumes that in a compound sentence that contains “zài再”, it is not necessary that the “zài再” clause must be talking about future events. The author observed that the event in a “zài再” clause must happen later than that in the preceding clause and called it the temporal constraint for the usage of “zài再”.

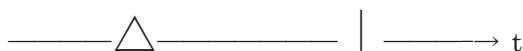
4. Discussion

In the above, the author mentioned how Li & Thompson have suggested the difference between “yòu又” and “zài再” is related to time and has given some counter examples to the suggestion.⁴⁾ The author believes that Li & Thompson have not clearly defined what is the reference point of “future”. When we are talking about “future” in a sentence, we may refer “future” to the time after we spoke the sentence. That is, the reference point is the time we

have spoken the sentence (the line is the time we spoke the sentence, the triangle is the reference point):



Or we may refer “future” to the time after a past event has happened, then the reference point is the time that the past event happened.



If we refer “future” to the time after a future event has happened, then the reference point is the time that the future event happened:



The author believes that “zài再” can be used to represent all these “futures”.

For the constraints of “yòu又”, the observation is correct but the constraint is too complicated. If not expressing a sequence or repetition, “yòu又” clause must have the same subject as the preceding clause. If the sentence is expressing a sequence or repetition, the subjects can be different.⁵⁾

For the question about what are the differences between “yòu又” and “zài再”, I believe they have four differences in usage. The most significant difference is “zài再” cannot be used with individual predicate. Thus the sentence

28) 他长得俊，身材又高大。

Tā zhǎngde shēncái yòu gāo dà.

He is handsome and tall.

is grammatical while the sentence

29) *他长得俊，身材再高大。

Tā zhǎngde shēncái zài gāo dà.

* He is handsome and tall.

is not, because the sentence contains individual predicates while “zài再” cannot co-occur with individual-level predicate.

The second difference the author has observed is “zài再” can be used to express the sense of “then”.

That is the clause containing “zài再” is expressing events that is resulted from the preceding clause.

“Yòu又” does not have such meaning.

Sentences like

30 (=6)) 一位作家出名后就当了文化经纪人，他一次性买断作家，再高价卖给出版社。

Yíwèi zuòjiā chūmíng hòu jiù dāngle wénhuà jīngjìrén, tā yícíxìng mǎiduàn zuòjiā, zài gāojià mài gěi chūbǎnshè.

An author became a cultural agent after he became famous. He bought the writer once and sold it to the publisher at a high price.

is grammatical while the version using “yòu又” is a bit strange:

31) ?一位作家出名后就当了文化经纪人，他一次性买断作家，又高价卖给出版社。

Yíwèi zuòjiā chūmíng hòu jiù dāngle wénhuà jīngjìrén, tā yícíxìng mǎiduàn zuòjiā, yòu gāojià mài gěi chūbǎnshè.

An author became a cultural agent after he became famous. He bought the writer once and sold it to the publisher at a high price.

The second sentence is not as good as the first one because “yòu又” does not indicate the resultant relation between first and second clause.

Thirdly, in situation that it is only required to indicate simple coordinate relation, we can only use “yòu又”, but not “zài再”. For example, consider the following sentence:

32) ... , 那里是库区, 人多地少, 又不允许发展工业, ...。

... , nà lǐ shíkù qūrén duō dìshǎo, yòu bù yǔn xǔ fāzhǎn gōngyè, ...

... , there is a reservoir area, there are fewer people, and it is not allowed to develop industry....

if we change “yòu又” into “zài再”, it is ungrammatical:

33) ... , *那裡是庫區, 人多地少, 再不允許發展工業, ...。

... , nà lǐ shíkù qūrén duō dìshǎo, zài bù yǔn xǔ fāzhǎn gōngyè, ...

..., * there is a reservoir area, there are fewer people, and no more industrial development is allowed....

The fourth difference is related to the notion of “focus”. Consider an example sentence mentioned earlier:

34 (=8)) 他又打破了一只盘子。

Tā yòu dǎpòle yīzhī pánzi.

He (also) broke a plate (again) .

The above sentence is ambiguous, it may mean that

- a. He has broken one or more plates before.
- b. Someone else has broken one or more plates before.
- c. He has broken something other than plates before.
- d. Someone else has broken something other than plates before.

For the first reading, “yòu又” is used in the sense of “again”, while for the other reading “yòu又” is used in the sense of “also”. No matter we pick up which reading, there is a kind of accumulation of information exists. However, it is not possible to disambiguate the sentence in written form but it seems that the position of stress (focus) will inflect the interpretation of these sentences. If we stress “yòu又”, we get the first reading while if we stress subject or object, we get the readings b to d in the sense of “also”.

If we substituted the above sentence with “zài再”:

35) 他再打破了一只盘子。

Tā zài dǎpòle yīzhī pánzi.

The author has found that the sentence can have the following readings:

- e. He has broken one or more plates before.
- f. He has broken something other than plates before.

So the sentence using “zài再” is contrast to the sentence using “yòu又” in the way that the former cannot have the two readings with a different actor in the discourse (like b and d of “yòu又” sentence).

In Biq (1988), he stated that

“Yòu functions as an operator, placing focus on a conversational topic by extending its (yòu’s) own scope over the linguistic string in the same sentence that comment varies from an NP to a whole sentence.”

After witnessing the above facts, the author believes that the differences between “yòu又” and “zài再” is concern with the different range of scope of “yòu又” and “zài再” that they can place focus. If how different between their range can be found, we may have a clear idea of the differences between the two adverbs.

The following table illustrates the main similarities and differences of “yòu又” and “zài再”:

| | yòu又 | zài再 |
|---|----------------------------|------------------|
| Can be used as purely coordinating connective | ✓ | |
| Contains the sense of “again” or repetition | ✓ | ✓ |
| Contains the sense of “then” | | ✓ |
| Compatibility with predicates | Stage-level and individual | Stage-level only |

5. Conclusion

In this research report, the author has reviewed various articles about “yòu又” and “zài再” and we have some conclusions on the differences between the two words. “Yòu又” can be used to express events that only involve simple coordination and repetition, but it cannot be used to express events that involve temporal factor including “again” and “then”, but it cannot be used to express those only involve simple coordination. Also, they are different in the range of scope they can place focus. Now we have some ideas about the different usage of “yòu又” and “zài再”, the next step will be trying to represent the properties of the two adverbs by formalized constraints. This may require consultation of various

semantic theories.

Acknowledgement

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Note

- 1) The examples used in this paper are mostly taken from the articles of Chinese magazine “Huáxiàwénzhāi (华夏文摘)”. Since the author is not a native speaker of standard Chinese (Putonghua), I will use self-constructed examples as little as possible to avoid controversy.
- 2) Note that in sentence 17) “zài再” is modifying “dao jie shang qu 到街上去” and “chi le liang wan hun-tun 吃了兩碗雲吞” together, so it is not indicating a repetition.
- 3) Simply speaking, a stage-level predicate is a predicate describing property or situation that will change over time and location, while an individual-level predicate describe a property that will not change over time and location. An example for stage-level predicate is “jump跳” in “他跳了起來” while an example for individual-level predicate is “tall高” in “他很高”.
- 4) The author also presumes that similar comment to the assertion by Li & Thompson and suggested that a sentence containing “zài再” is grammatical if clause containing “zài再” happen after preceding clause.
- 5) Note that individual predicates cannot form a sequence or repetition.

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